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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0651
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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SUBJECT: MODERATE KYRGYZ ANALYSIS OF BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP
AND THE BASE

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11. (SBU) Summary: In an interview with AKIpress that was picked up by other media outlets, political commentator Valentin Bogatyrev analyzed growing anti-American sentiment and opposition to the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan. He said there were base-related reasons for the concerns, but that certain groups were exploiting these concerns to fan "anti-American hysteria." Bogatyrev also suggested that the U.S. was "ceding its position" in Central Asia, and that the "inadequate response" of the U.S. to incidents at the base had been devastating for Kyrgyz attitudes toward the U.S. Bogatyrev, the former director of International Institute of Strategic Studies at the Kyrgyz presidential administration, remains well connected to both the government and the opposition in Kyrgyzstan. He is a regular contact of the Embassy, and his views often reflect or anticipate the official GOKG view. Against a backdrop of relentlessly negative reporting in the Kyrgyz media, we believe Bogatyrev's more moderate analysis is worth considering as we put greater efforts to combating misinformation and negative spin and managing Kyrgyz expectations regarding the base. End Summary.

Real Mistakes and Hype

12. (SBU) On May 28, analyst Valentin Bogatyrev gave an interview to web-based AKIpress in which he discussed growing negative attitudes toward the U.S. in Kyrgyzstan. The article, headlined "U.S. Has Made Obvious Mistakes in its Central Asia Strategy," stated that the negative attitudes resulted from both actual reasons and intentional fanning of sentiments. Bogatyrev said the public had concerns related to the Manas Coalition Airbase and how long it would remain in Kyrgyzstan. He said that despite years of efforts, the situation in Afghanistan remained unstable, giving rise to questions whether the military strategy there was effective. The continued instability also led to an impression that some

benefited from the situation, including those making money from selling arms and from reconstruction, and drug traffickers. He said the public needed estimates about meeting benchmarks to allow curtailing military operations in Afghanistan, thus determining the duration of the base in Kyrgyzstan.

¶3. (SBU) Bogatyrev said that the Kyrgyz people had concerns about the base SOFA because they were not sure about the safety of the base following recent incidents. In addition, the public had little information about the benefits from the base because of the lack of transparency surrounding payments and other benefits. Comparing Manas to the Russian airbase at Kant, he said it was not clear why one base would stay for free (Kant), while another paid rents (Manas), if both bases were needed for the security of the country. But since the country had grown used to begging, he said, the day would come when picketers would go to the Russian base demanding payments.

U.S. Playing into the Hands of its Rivals

¶4. (SBU) Bogatyrev said that the current "anti-American hysteria" worked to the interests of those who did not like the presence of an American base in the country -- Russia, China, and Uzbekistan. He said that Russia and Uzbekistan were interested in restricting American influence, particularly on democratic and electoral processes. Representatives of those countries did not have to organize the anti-American campaign themselves, however, because the driving force behind the campaign was the "Sodrujestvo" party, a party known for its pro-Russian bias and its commitment to the ideals of the USSR. (Note: and also thought to be funded by Russia. End note.)

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¶5. (SBU) Bogatyrev lamented that the anti-American campaign was able to use recent base-related incidents, particularly the December shooting (of a Kyrgyz truck driver by a U.S. airman). The shooting had caused a lot of negative sentiment, and there was a question whether Russian circles were exploiting the issue. Referring to Kyrgyz complaints about the airman's "immunity" from prosecution in Kyrgyzstan, Bogatyrev noted that jurisdiction was determined by the SOFA, and that the U.S. had experience in punishing military members who committed offenses overseas. But, he said, "we can only hope that justice will prevail, and we have a right to demand that justice is done,"

Russia Isn't Winning; U.S. Is Losing

¶6. (SBU) On regional politics, Bogatyrev argued that Russia was not increasing its position, but the U.S. was ceding influence in Central Asia. Except for Russian attempts to retain its energy monopoly, Russian capital was giving way to Kazakh capital, and Russian goods to Chinese goods. That Kyrgyz MPs would raise the base issue after a trip to Moscow reflected more their "adaptability" rather than increasing Russian influence. The Americans, on the other hand, have been ceding influence themselves. The first reason was because of mistakes in their Central Asia strategy, evident in Tashkent, where the American base was evicted and the geopolitical orientation of the government changed; in Bishkek, where the change in power resulted in a more rigid policy toward the U.S.; and in Astana, where the energy market turned out to be diversified, with a strong presence of China. The second reason had to do with the aftermath of the Iraq war. When the war started, Kyrgyzstan did not approve of the American invasion. Now that it is clear to everyone, including the Americans, that the war was a mistake, any hint that Manas airbase might be used for another mission provokes a strong response, he said.

17. (SBU) Bogatyrev concluded that the American response to the shooting and other base incidents has been inadequate. He said the American side "follows the logic of minimizing material expenses." Such an approach may be good in business, but it has been devastating for the attitude in Kyrgyzstan toward Americans. Instead of seeing the U.S. as a friend and country providing assistance, people see the U.S. as a rude guest. The resulting damage to the U.S. image is enormous compared to the "saving on compensations." "Defending the interests of the base (in this way), the American side causes immeasurably greater damage to the interests of their country and to its image."

YOVANOVITCH